

WEIGHT LOSS TIPS AND TRICKS

By Julie Cottrell, MS, RD, LD

Weight management is not just about ONE thing. **Calories** - the thing we often pay most attention to - do matter - but it's not *just* about counting them up. **Food quality** is equally important, as the first role of food is to *nourish* us. Selecting higher quality foods is part of the equation. The effect of our food choices on our **hormones** is also important; this effect is often left out of many "diet" plans. Various forms of **exercise** can be helpful - but you can't eat a horrible diet and then simply exercise those bad choices away. And *excessive exercise* can do more harm than good. **Truly, weight management is about a host of things that, when combined, will result in a healthy flow of energy into and out of your body.** Use these topics showcased below as a platform from which to explore your options and have discussions with your medical team. Begin to experiment. Find your path over time. New habits will need to be formed that can be SUSTAINED. This is a journey to become a healthier version of yourself.

Scan through this list to find things to experiment with as you develop your plan.

- CALORIES DO MATTER.** You don't necessarily need to "count them" as part of your plan. But it IS important to recognize that they are part of the equation that determines whether you are losing, gaining or maintaining your current body weight. **To lose weight, you do need to be in a deficit.** We must find ways to take in less total energy than the body needs (while still feeling satiated) so we can also **burn stored energy.** Always keep this in mind, regardless of which other strategies you use. See [CALORIE AND MACRO TARGETS](#) for help determining a ballpark range.
- HAVING ANY SYSTEM IS HELPFUL.** For some people, this system might be "low-carb" or "keto"; in these plans, calories are controlled due to limited sugars/starches and ultra-processed foods. Alternatively, "vegetarian" or "plant-based" might work for some, as higher-fat/higher-calorie animal foods are reduced or eliminated. Some people may like to "count points" as per Weight Watchers; others may prefer to count calories using apps like [MyFitnessPal](#). Figure out what system can work for you **long-term**. Note: It is completely acceptable to use some strategies as a **short-term** intervention to "jump start" your plan; just beware that you will still need to develop habits that support a long-term plan, otherwise your efforts will not be lasting.
- TIMING OF FOOD INTAKE MATTERS.** Having a shorter "eating window"(EW), not grazing and snacking all day long, and cutting out the late night eating are all valuable. Try delaying breakfast if you aren't hungry first thing in the morning; this will help to condense your EW. Understanding the importance of shorter eating windows/longer periods of fasting is the subject of much research. It's truly the longer fasting period (16 hours is a good target) that seems to be the key.
- EXPERIMENT WITH INTERMITTENT FASTING.** Intermittent fasting (IF) - also referred to as time-restricted eating (TRE) - is a system based on an extended time of not eating (a minimum of 12 hours, but often 16 or 18 hours). This is referred to as 12:12, 14:10, 16:8, 18:6, etc. The downtime from eating improves insulin levels, gut health, and **appetite control**, and usually leads to weight loss as long as the foods eaten within the eating window aren't excessive. Experiment to see what type of fasting vs eating window feels best for you. Note: It can vary from day to day; you may have one system that works on weekdays and another for weekends.

- CHOOSE MORE NUTRIENT-DENSE FOODS.** This will usually be foods with some combination of protein, fiber, healthy fats, and less carbs/sugars. These foods usually have few ingredients and are minimally processed. Weight Watchers potato chips for “2 points” is not part of this strategy. Nutrient-dense foods tend to be more satiating, which leads to less total food consumption. Check out this Healthline article: [The 11 Most Nutrient-Dense Foods on the Planet](#).
- TRY BUILDING MEALS AROUND PROTEIN-BASED FOODS.** Eating more protein may improve satiety and allow your meals to last longer. Eating an adequate amount of protein will also help to [preserve lean body mass](#), which ultimately affects metabolism. Animal-based proteins are usually more effective, but plant-based protein sources can also be used. Example: If your salad doesn't have chicken or some other protein on it, try adding some to see if the meal lasts you longer. See [PROTEIN FOODS](#) for more information.
- SATIETY MATTERS!** Satiety (pronounced “suh-tie-eh-tee”) is currently the focus of obesity research. We aren't looking for a plan where you feel dissatisfied and deprived! You should feel **full and satisfied** after eating, like you can walk away and have plenty of energy for hours to come (or even overnight). The “grazing mentality” is the opposite of this; you are always expecting to eat again in a few minutes. As you shift away from constantly snacking, toward foods with staying power (see nutrient-dense item above), you should find greater satisfaction with your meals, and can <eventually> cut the cord that ties you to the pantry and fridge.
- MAXIMIZE SATIETY FOR THE LEAST AMOUNT OF CALORIES.** **Satiety-per-calorie** refers to the amount of calories you spend in order to feel “satiated” or satisfied. Eating a bag of potato chips or several slices of pizza may provide a lot of satiety, but at what caloric cost? Contrast that with foods like lettuce and [non-starchy veggies](#) which have fewer calories but only temporarily fill you up (satiety isn't lasting). **Look for a balance** (something that looks like a complete meal) where you spend a reasonable amount of your calorie budget while knowing you will feel full and satisfied for many hours. This will usually be a combination of protein, healthy fats and a small amount of carbs. Having more **fiber** also improves satiety.
- LIQUID CALORIES WON'T LAST VERY LONG.** If you have a “protein shake” as a meal, understand that you will be hungry again in just a couple hours. Liquids empty from the stomach more quickly than solid food. Some shakes will last longer than others, especially if you add fiber, healthy fats, etc. to them.
- AVOID BLOOD SUGAR ROLLER COASTERS.** When we eat ultra-processed foods and simple sugars, blood sugar and insulin will spike, then fall. **The falling blood sugar will trigger hunger.** “Healthy” cereals and many items promoted as breakfast foods fall into this category; it would be better to NOT EAT breakfast than to eat a granola bar, sugary yogurt or a piece of fruit on your way out the door. You will be hungry again in an hour or two anyway! Also look out for more obvious sources like candy bars, cookies and other treats. Beware of sugar in beverages too (juice, sweet tea and soda). **Once you get on a blood sugar roller coaster, you will constantly chase cravings and will experience highs and lows in your energy level.** Much better to find foods that provide more **steady energy!!** Note: Some people like to use a CGM (continuous glucose monitor) to try to identify which foods spike their [blood sugar](#); this can help fine tune your choices over time. People are often surprised at how many “healthy” foods spike blood sugar.
- REDUCING CARBS CAN GO A LONG WAY TOWARD HELPING YOU LOSE WEIGHT.** Foods high in **carbs** are everywhere, and most of us eat too many of them. Carbs increase insulin levels, which then sends a message to body fat to keep this energy locked in storage. **We want to open the door to your fat cells** so energy can be released. **Lower insulin levels** are needed for this to happen. Experiment with some “carb swaps”, avoid highly processed foods (carbs + unhealthy

fats), get rid of sugary beverages, and look for other unnecessary carbs that you can simply leave off. A burger without the bun can be just as satisfying! Skip the chips at the Mexican restaurant. You don't have to be "keto" - but dropping some unnecessary carbs can be helpful!

- INCLUDE STRATEGIES THAT SPECIFICALLY REDUCE INSULIN.** Remember that high insulin levels block body fat from being used for energy. Finding ways to reduce insulin is a smart strategy. This may include: eating less times per day; eating less carbs; using aids like lemon, lime, cinnamon or apple cider vinegar with meals to decrease insulin spikes; including all forms of exercise in our plan, and using exercise more strategically; managing stress; getting more sleep. In terms of **using exercise strategically**, you will likely find that you can exercise more intensely while fasted (see item above) which has an advantage for burning body fat; but doing active chores or taking a stroll after dinner can help reduce blood sugar and insulin, which also promotes weight loss. See [BLOOD SUGAR: WAYS TO STABILIZE IT](#) for lots more tips.
- INCLUDE FOODS HIGHER IN FIBER AS PART OF YOUR PLAN.** Fiber is the part of food that we cannot digest. When we eat it, it makes its way down to our intestines where our bacteria live, and provides food for them instead. As they break down the fiber, they release something called "short chain fatty acids" (SCFAs). These have been studied for their potential health benefits, of which there are many, including weight management and blood sugar regulation. Check out this Healthline article: [How Short-Chain Fatty Acids Affect Healthy and Weight](#). Look for natural ways to increase fiber, like eating more non-starchy veggies, legumes, fresh berries, oats (if you tolerate more carbs), and seeds like chia seeds. [Resistant starch](#) helps too!
- TAKE CARE OF YOUR MICROBIOME.** The microbiome refers to the bacteria in your intestines. Maintaining a healthy microbiome is imperative to all aspects of health. Provide the right environment for them so they will stick around and do good things for you! You can bring them into your body by eating some [foods containing probiotics](#) or by using a [probiotic supplement](#). Be sure to eat some foods with fiber ([prebiotics](#)); this is food for the gut bacteria. Avoid foods that disrupt the microbiome (sugars, ultra-processed foods, seed oils, some sugar substitutes). Exercise, sunlight and water also help, in addition to vitamin D. Note that some populations of good bacteria **thrive on fiber** (which is why we want to include some fiber in our diet); but some of the good bacteria thrive when **NOTHING is in our intestines** (which is why we want to include some fasting as part of our plan).
- WATCH OUT FOR SUGAR SUBSTITUTES.** Many sugar-free/calorie-free items use versions of sugar substitutes that are unfavorable. They may cause insulin levels to rise even though there is no sugar; and they may negatively affect the gut bacteria, causing the wrong ones to thrive.
 - Avoid sucralose, aspartame and saccharin.**
 - More favorable options are stevia, erythritol, monk fruit and allulose.**

Note that even using "acceptable" sugar substitutes can work against you if they *create a desire for more sweet things*. Taming our craving for sweets is a worthwhile goal! Here is a good Healthline article: [Do Artificial Sweeteners Harm Your Good Gut Bacteria?](#). Also refer to this resource: [SUGAR AND SUGAR SUBSTITUTES](#).
- OPTIMIZE YOUR VITAMIN D LEVEL** Vitamin D plays a role in metabolism and energy production. Every cell in the body has a receptor for vitamin D. Most people have suboptimal levels - but we may not know it because **it's not a part of routine lab work**. Get your level checked, and then develop a supplement plan to get into a more optimal range, if needed. A good target is 80-100 ng/dL. Read [SUNSHINE AND VITAMIN D](#) for more information. Note that you will need a higher dose initially (perhaps 4-6 months) to build up your body stores (this is often 5000 IU's D3 + K2); and then for maintenance you can drop down to 2000 IU's D3 + K2. Keeping your D level in an optimal range is a lifelong task! It's smart to get your level checked at least twice per year.

- MAKE SLEEP A PRIORITY, NOT AN AFTERTHOUGHT.** If you knew that 7-8 hours of quality sleep would be THE THING that helped you lose weight – with no additional effort on your part other than getting into bed sooner and learning how to get better quality sleep – would you do it? The fact is, sleep CAN do this for you! It is worth your time and effort to learn how to sleep better. Get off your electronics, quiet your mind, dim the lights, make sure your bedroom is dark...**Set yourself up for success** and see what happens! Check out [SLEEP: YOUR RESET BUTTON](#) to learn more.
- AVOID EATING WITHIN 2-3 HOURS OF BEDTIME.** Sleep is a time to REPAIR. The body has a specific program it uses for this process. We cycle through stages of light, deep and REM sleep; and this can actually be “seen” by wearing things like an Apple watch or [Oura ring](#). Eating too close to bedtime will interfere with the first few hours of your sleep cycle. Make an effort to eat your last meal earlier (as often as possible) and avoid snacking after dinner. Alcohol disrupts sleep too!
- USE STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES.** Stress is a factor in most of our lives, and some forms of stress cannot be avoided. However, when we are constantly stressed out, we are in “flight or fight” mode and the hormone called **cortisol** remains high. This causes a problem with insulin regulation, as well as a cascade of other problems. Learning to manage stress is extremely important. This resource from Positive Psychology may be helpful: [10 Techniques to Manage Stress & 13 Quick Tips](#). Say a prayer and calm yourself before eating too!
- BE CAREFUL WITH ALCOHOL.** You *may* be able to include a small amount of alcohol in your plan; but if you are having a weight loss stall, try a week or three without it and see what happens. [Here](#) is a document that discusses alcohol in more depth.
- DRINK MORE WATER!** This is the fluid that your body really craves, and it can be an easy tool to include in your overall plan. Drink at least half your body weight in ounces of water per day. Read this for inspiration: [How Drinking More Water Can Help You Lose Weight](#).
- MINIMIZE OBESOGENS.** Obesogens are chemicals in our food – and other products – that could promote obesity. You don’t have to become “obsessed” with eating ALL organic foods, or be fearful of everything you might breathe or put into your body; however, it could help to make some mindful adjustments where you can. Examples: Avoid drinking water out of plastic bottles; get a **BPA-free container** instead. Use more fresh foods that haven’t been overly processed (to which countless chemicals have been added) and then stuffed into plastic containers. And if you do purchase food in plastic of any kind, be careful not to microwave/heat the food in that container; instead put it into a glass dish or microwave-safe container first. Here is a Healthline article where you can learn more: [5 Obesogens: Artificial Chemicals That Make You Fat](#).
- STOP SNACKING AND GRAZING.** This pattern of behavior interferes with hormonal regulation, and is a big reason why you can’t lose weight. Most snacks are a source of carbs; eating carbs constantly makes you a “carb/sugar burner” and not a “fat burner”. As you tone down the amount of snacking you do, your body can learn to burn fat. This may take a little time. But eventually, you can train your body to not expect (or need) these little crutches, and you can move through your day with more *food freedom*.
- TRY A LONGER FAST TO ACCELERATE YOUR EFFORTS.** Going longer than 12 hours without eating may seem like an insurmountable task as you get started. But you may find that you CAN go longer sometimes after you build up the metabolic machinery to burn fat better. Once this happens, you might try extending your overnight fast for longer. Maybe you can wait until noon to eat, or maybe you can wait even longer, and go from dinner one night until dinner the following night. This isn’t something you need to do daily. But occasionally using this strategy can potentially provide a benefit and “turbo boost” your weight loss efforts.

- UNDERSTAND WHAT A “CLEAN FAST” IS.** This means that while you are fasting, you may drink black coffee, tea or water; but you don’t add anything to these items. No sugar substitutes of any kind and no cream in the coffee or tea. Gin Stephens is a big proponent of this type of fasting; her podcast is called “[Intermittent Fasting Stories](#)”. Many of her followers started off with a “dirty fast” (having “coffee milkshakes” as she calls them), but they usually find that when they embrace the idea of a “clean fast”, they have MORE energy and can go much longer without eating.
- INCLUDE EXERCISE TO STRENGTHEN YOUR BODY.** Exercise is a great tool to promote your health. It is good to include all different types, including walking/moving more; aerobic; HIIT (high intensity interval training); resistance exercises; and stretching/yoga. These different types of exercise can strengthen muscles, the cardiovascular system and even your mind. The psychological boost from exercise is also beneficial. You may burn some calories too, but don’t make calorie-burning the goal. **Exercise should energize you, not drain you.**
- SPECIFICALLY WORK ON INCREASING YOUR MUSCLE MASS.** Resistance-type exercises can help you build muscle. Muscle is valuable as we age because it is what allows us to keep moving and living independently. Muscle also helps with blood sugar regulation. It is a storage site for glycogen (sugar); the more muscle you have, the easier it is for you to manage blood sugar. Check out [EXERCISE TIPS](#) and [STRENGTH EXERCISES FOR BEGINNERS](#) to see ways to include some resistance exercises in your plan.
- TRY A FASTED WORKOUT.** It may seem scary, but you may be pleasantly surprised at how EASY it is to take a walk, run or complete your exercise without eating first, particularly if you exercise in the morning. Try it sometime and see! Note that black coffee won’t break your fast; and be sure to hydrate with water first. One reason fasted exercise helps is that after a good night’s rest, your hormones are better balanced and your insulin level is lower. This allows body fat to be burned for energy much more easily. You don’t have to make the workout long; just try 10 minutes the first time to see how you feel. Add 5 more minutes if you can, and build up over time. You may find that this is much preferred to exercising with food gurgling around in your belly!
- AVOID STOCKING HYPER-PALATABLE FOODS.** Keeping a “clean” food environment in your home is a recipe for success. Foods that “call your name” and that you can’t “eat just one” of should not have a place in your home. Figure out which foods tend to derail you and avoid them at all cost. Anything you can do to increase the distance between you and these foods - to at least make it more difficult to access them - is a good strategy. These foods are usually high in sugar, fat or combination of the two, and they disrupt everything we have named in this document.
- OTHER AIDS.** [BERBERINE](#) is a supplement that can sensitize your body to insulin. If you try all of these other things and still feel the need for an additional aid, this may be worth trying. [MAGNESIUM](#) is a mineral that many folks are deficient in but which we need for many metabolic processes. Consider taking a supplement, particularly before bed, since it can help relax you and improve sleep.

BONUS MATERIAL

METABOLISM: WHAT REALLY KEEPS IT FROM DROPPING?

The idea that eating more frequently to “stoke the metabolism” was promoted for so long, we assume that it is fact, and that our metabolism will become sluggish if we somehow don’t eat constantly. This is not the case! Instead, check out this list of things that actually WILL improve your metabolism:

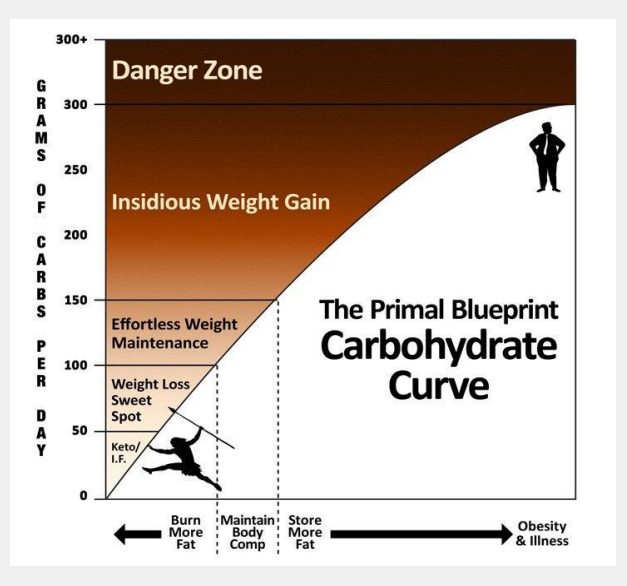
Healthline | [9 Easy Ways to Boost Your Metabolism \(Backed by Science\)](#). Note: “Eating constantly” is not on the list!!

For easy reference, here are the 9 ways named in the article:

- ❖ [Eat plenty of protein at every meal](#)
- ❖ [Drink more cold water](#)
- ❖ [Do a high intensity workout](#)
- ❖ [Lift heavy things](#)
- ❖ [Stand up more](#)
- ❖ [Drink green tea or oolong tea](#)
- ❖ [Eat spicy foods](#)
- ❖ [Get a good night’s sleep](#)
- ❖ [Drink coffee](#)

CARBS: WHAT IS A REASONABLE AMOUNT TO HAVE EACH DAY?

Many people lose weight more easily by reducing their carb intake. There are a variety of reasons why this can be a good strategy. Many of these reasons are noted in the first Healthline article below. The carb goals named are on target too. Some people can lose weight just by **getting under 100 grams** of carbs per day (see graph, right), but others need to limit carbs to 50 grams or even less per day. Experiment to find your number. Also check out the 2nd article regarding reasons weight loss can stall on a low carb or ANY diet plan. This is an excellent troubleshooting list, so check it out and avoid these pitfalls!



- ❖ **Healthline | [How Many Carbs Should You Eat per Day to Lose Weight?](#)**
- ❖ **Healthline | [Top 15 Reasons You’re Not Losing Weight on a Low-Carb Diet](#)**

INSULIN: GOOD OR BAD?

Insulin is a hormone that we NEED. It serves MANY roles in our body.

- ❖ It helps us use and store energy.
- ❖ It promotes growth of muscles and lean body mass.
- ❖ It helps regulate blood sugar so that our bloodstream receives a constant supply of energy but isn't "flooded" with too much.

Insulin does all of these things and more. Because insulin is such an important hormone, we need for it to be present in proper amounts.

ASSESSING INSULIN: A FASTING INSULIN TEST

People who struggle to lose weight often have high levels of circulating insulin. Insulin itself isn't "bad"; it is simply present in excessive amounts. We can test for this by doing a **fasting insulin test** (see link below to learn about it). If yours is high, it is constantly sending signals to your body to STORE rather than RELEASE energy (which makes it difficult to lose weight!). This is one big reason why a lower-carb diet can be an effective strategy. Eating less carbs causes less insulin stimulation and can help the body to more easily release stored energy (from body fat) over time.

Fasting Insulin Test: Normal Range + Low & High Levels

- The fasting insulin test can be used to assess insulin resistance.
- Note that fasting insulin is on a spectrum. As your fasting number climbs, this reflects an increasing amount of insulin resistance.
- The "normal" range for insulin is often listed as 2-25.
- Many health leaders advise that a more optimal level is <7, and preferably <5.

INSULIN SENSITIVITY

The opposite of insulin resistance is being more "insulin sensitive". We want our body to be insulin sensitive. This means that it takes LESS insulin to do its job. Having less insulin in your body is associated with health and longevity. Here is a good article to explain this, including a list of ways to increase insulin sensitivity: **Healthline | [14 Natural Ways to Improve Your Insulin Sensitivity](#)**.

WAYS TO BECOME MORE INSULIN SENSITIVE	
Get more sleep.	Reduce your intake of added sugars.
Exercise more.	Add herbs and spices to your cooking.
Reduce stress.	Add a pinch of cinnamon.
Lose a few pounds.	Drink green tea.
Eat more soluble fiber.	Try apple cider vinegar.
Add more colorful fruits and vegetables to your diet.	Avoid trans fats.
Cut down on carbs.	Try a supplement.

WEIGHT-REGULATING HORMONES

This is a really good article that outlines 9 major hormones that may affect your body weight.

- ❖ Healthline | [9 Hormones That Affect Your Weight – and How to Improve Them](#)

Click on these links to learn more about each one, including some tips:

Insulin	Cortisol	Glucagon-like peptide-1
Leptin	Estrogen	Cholecystokinin
Ghrelin	Neuropeptide Y	Peptide YY

Note: Most of these tips provide great advice. However, the caution regarding saturated fat and red meat is inaccurate. Neither are harmful, especially in the context of a whole-food/lower carb plan. Also, the idea of “eating regularly” to minimize the effect of ghrelin may be misinterpreted; see handout “Time Restricted Eating” to learn more about our circadian clock. Focus on meals, not constantly snacking, to tame the ghrelin hormone.

HYPERPALATABLE FOODS and FOOD ADDICTION

Are there foods that are difficult to stop eating once you start? Indeed there are! The word that describes such foods is “hyper-palatable”. These foods tend to be high in **salt, fat and sugar** (like hot dogs, pizza, doughnuts, pretzels). The opposite of these foods is whole, real foods (like an apple). These 2 articles address this topic and help us understand which foods to eat less of (mostly processed food items) and which to include more of (foods with single or few ingredients, minimally processed).

- ❖ Newsweek | [Most Food in America is Hyper-Palatable and ‘Difficult to Stop Eating,’ Scientists Say](#)
- ❖ Healthline | [The 18 Most Addictive Foods \(and the 17 Least Addictive\)](#)

SUGAR ADDICTION

Are you addicted to sugar? Here is an EXCELLENT, straightforward plan to help you break the addiction. Click on the article for the nice “infographics” too!

Cleveland Clinic Break Your Sugar Addiction in 10 Days <i>“How to kiss sugar addiction goodbye. Do this for 10 days for a quick, powerful detox.”</i>	
1. Make the decision.	6. Include good fats at every meal.
2. Quit cold turkey.	7. Manage your stress.
3. Don’t drink your calories.	8. Quit gluten and dairy.
4. Add protein to every meal.	9. Sleep.
5. Eat the right carbs.	

This resource offers a few other things to try: Healthline | [A Simple 3-Step Plan to Stop Sugar Cravings](#)